

# Smart meetings

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# Michelle Woodley



president of  
Preferred Hotels & Resorts

Influence is the power to have an important effect on something or someone in an important way.

It's all about girl power at Preferred Hotels & Resorts. Michelle Woodley was promoted to president, inheriting the role from Lindsey Ueberroth, the company's CEO, but they'll continue to work together on financial planning and talent management.

Woodley has served the company for 15 years, as senior vice president of global marketing and strategy, senior vice president of revenue management and distribution and executive vice president.

"We highly value our relationships with our planner partners and do our best to cater to their needs and interests, as evident by the fact that when several chains recently cut their groups sales commissions, we doubled down and offered a limited-time promotion that actually increased the commission we pay, along with extra incentives through our I Prefer program," Woodley says.

## Early Inspirations

Woodley discovered hospitality by watching the 1980s TV show *Hotel*. "The beautiful hotel, elegant attire of the [assistant general] manager, Christine, played by Connie Sellecca, and the romance of every episode were certainly a draw," she says.

She also had an early love of cooking—she catered meals for her mom's bridge group and her brother's prom. A Chicago native, Woodley comes from a Greek family. Upon immigrating to the United States, one of her grandfathers was a grocer and the other was a bellman at The Blackstone Hotel in Chicago before opening a candy store.

During her senior year at Cornell University's School of Hotel

Administration in Ithaca, New York, Woodley served as managing director for Hotel Ezra Cornell. This hands-on experience prepared her for her career at Preferred and Swissotel Chicago.

## Women Helping Women

Mary Anne Russell, front office manager at Swissotel Chicago, mentored Woodley when she was recruited to be a systems manager. Woodley remembers "how much I admired her firm handshake, confidence in what she did and huge smile on her face."

Less than two years later, Russell was promoted to rooms division manager and nominated Woodley to fill her shoes. The general manager doubted Woodley's readiness, but Russell defended her. They were given a 60-day challenge to prove themselves, which they did.

"I will never forget her confidence in me and her approach—to hire for talent and train for skill," Woodley says.

## Symbolic Meaning of the Pineapple

Woodley is excited to be celebrating Preferred's 50th anniversary this year. During the hotel's rebranding in 2005, the company debuted the pineapple as its new logo, and it became an even larger part of its identity during another rebranding in 2015.

"The pineapple's legacy as the universal symbol of hospitality dates back more than 500 years, when sailors were searching for places to rest during their explorations," she says. "Whenever they would stop in a port town in the tropics, they realized that residents would hang pineapples in front of their homes as a sign that visitors were welcome."

## Smart Moves



### David Almond

Associated Luxury Hotels International added David Almond to the global sales team as regional vice president of sales for the Midwest United States and Canada division. Based in the Chicago office, he oversees teams in Chicago, Toronto, Louisville, Kentucky, and Kansas City, Missouri. He previously worked at InterContinental Chicago Magnificent Mile, Starwood Hotels of Downtown Chicago and Hiltons of Chicago.



### Darryl Leggieri

Discover Saratoga, also known as Saratoga Convention & Tourism Bureau, announced Darryl Leggieri as its new president. He joined the CVB after 13 years at The Saratoga Hilton, where he drove conventions and meetings to the hotel as director of sales and marketing, booking an average of 32,000–34,000 group room nights annually. Leggieri previously worked at Desmond Hotel and Conference Center in Albany, New York.



### Lisa Gray Messina

As vice president of sales for Caesars Entertainment Corporation, Lisa Gray Messina will lead strategies for meetings and events. Most recently, she was executive director of intermediary group sales for Hilton Worldwide in Las Vegas. Messina also served as chief marketing officer of ConferenceDirect, director of sales at Hyatt Hotels & Resorts in Washington, D.C., and director of sales at Wyndham Hotels & Resorts.



### Peter Strebel

Peter Strebel has been promoted to president of Omni Hotels & Resorts, after serving as the company's chief marketing officer and senior vice president of sales. He's been with the company for 20 years, and worked for Wyndham Hotel Group from 2001 to 2009 as executive vice president and chief marketing officer before his most recent promotion.



### David Tyler

David Tyler returns to Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club in Florida as director of sales and marketing. He previously served in the role for five years and was assistant director of sales. Tyler worked as director of sales and business development at Rumbling Bald Resort at Lake Lure in Asheville, North Carolina, and also worked at The Atlantic Hotel & Spa in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and Turnberry Associates Hotels & Resorts in Orlando.